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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000809

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTEST UPDATE - NO IDEAS, NO PROTESTERS,
STILL NO COMPROMISE

REF: TBILISI 800

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Protests on Monday, April 27 which were supposed to include announcement of a new action plan consisted of no more than 1000 protesters in front of Parliament and a few more scattered at the Presidential Residence, Public Broadcasters Building, State Chancellery, and Freedom Square. A concert is scheduled for Tuesday, April 28, but a meeting with Levan Gachechiladze revealed that the non-parliamentary opposition has not come to any decisions as to how to move forward. Gachechiladze hinted at a willingness to talk, but only with President Saakashvili. The Patriarch called on both Government and opposition leaders to attend a penance service on April 28 at 6 pm. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: Once again, the non-parliamentary opposition could only turn out a minimal crowd on a sunny afternoon. In private, some non-parliamentary opposition leaders seem to be signaling a willingness to end the protests, but they seem en masse unable to realistically assess their relative bargaining power and popularity. Questions of a lack of support are routinely explained away by relying on their "gut instincts" as to what the people of Georgia want and conspiracy theories as to why turnout has been so small. Though seemingly aware in some sense that they are losing leverage by the day, the non-parliamentary opposition continues to draw the wrong conclusions. Preferring to ignore the possibility that the Georgian public does not support them or their goals, non-parliamentary leaders are focusing on "educating" diplomats and blaming the media - again highlighting the small echo chamber in which many of the non-parliamentary leaders operate. End Comment.

Protest's New Action Plan We'll Get Back to You

¶3. (C) A small crowd of about 1000 protesters appeared on Monday, April 27. No substantial change occurred since late last week with a small number of protesters staying in cells outside of Parliament, the Presidential Residence, Public Broadcasters Building, State Chancellery, and Freedom Square. The roads in front of MOIA, Public Broadcasters Building, and Rustaveli Avenue to Freedom Square remained blocked. Former Presidential Candidate Levan Gachechiladze told the DCM that they were considering blocking Chavchavadze Avenue (a major thoroughfare in the Vake District) in front of Tbilisi State University with cells on the recommendation of a "couple" of students. Other well-trafficked areas around Tbilisi are being considered for "cell cities" according to Gachechiladze. Gachechiladze dismissed questions about whether roadblocks simply alienate people and serve to further marginalize the non-parliamentary opposition. He said that nothing has been agreed upon as far as new tactics. One notable moment on April 27 was when an elderly lady took to the stage and started to deliver a speech apparently complaining about the protest organizers and the protests

(her speech was inaudible on TV and to Embassy observers). Her microphone was then cut off and she was escorted away.

Willingness to Talk or Deja Vu All Over Again

14. (C) Gachechiladze said the non-parliamentary opposition was willing to talk, but only with President Saakashvili at a publicized event. Gachechiladze said the meeting needed to be without an agenda and could be private (except for the fact the meeting had taken place). He said it was up to Saakashvili to provide a concrete time and place. Gachechiladze indicated that the non-parliamentary opposition would pick a few leaders to represent the group. He said that Nino Burjanadze has pushed the idea of a meeting with Saakashvili saying negotiations with anybody else are worthless. Gachechiladze dismissed concerns that the non-parliamentary opposition was too divergent in its aims and personalities to provide a coherent group with which to negotiate. He noted that Saakashvili could name the number of opposition leaders to meet and the opposition would choose its spokesmen. (Embassy Comment: Gachechiladze seemed open to negotiations but again apart from Saakashvili's resignation, had no clear fallback position. Gachechiladze, along with Burjanadze, appears to have taken on somewhat of a "first among equals" leadership role so his comments might signify a greater willingness of the group as a whole to negotiate. However, Tbilisi based diplomats and other interlocutors have been given private messages of moderation before from non-parliamentary leaders only to be followed by more radical public statements the next day. End Comment.)

Don't Bother Us With the Facts

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15. (C) Gachechiladze argued that the public overwhelmingly supports the opposition cause and claimed that 1000 protesters were sleeping in front of Parliament and 300 at the Public Broadcasters Building. (Embassy Note: These figures are wildly exaggerated with only perhaps 25-50 in front of Parliament and 5-10 at the Public Broadcasters. The cage infrastructure, if full, could only hold a fraction of what Gachechiladze claimed. End Note.) He stated that every family in Tbilisi was sending one representative a day to the protests on a rotating basis to explain their support was much greater than it appeared. Then, in a strange non sequitur to a question that was never asked, Gachechiladze said that "(y)ou know, we're not paying them!". Gachechiladze claimed that the non-parliamentary opposition was having no financial trouble in spite of the public requests for donations. Gachechiladze went to complain about the unfairness of the media and that polling data was not objective, but rather, controlled by Minister of Interior Vano Merabishvili and was not an accurate gauge of public sentiment. In response to French Ambassador Fournier's pointed remarks (reftel) about the non-parliamentary opposition, a new task force has been established to ensure that diplomats are getting access to "correct information" about what is actually happening in Georgia. The group will consist of Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia), Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), Irakli Alasania (Alliance for Georgia), and Kakha Kukava (Conservatives). Gachechiladze said that the opposition hoped to brief diplomats on next steps on April 30.

Bakradze Leaks Private Radical Opposition Meeting

16. (C) Speaker David Bakradze's public announcement that he had met with a number of radical members of the non-parliamentary opposition was publicly met with opposition derision. Nino Burjanadze said she was unaware of any meetings and called the statement an attempt to sow discord among the non-parliamentary opposition. Tina Khidasheli (Republican Party) called the Speaker's statement irresponsible and demanded that he name the people with whom

he met. We know that Bakradze met fringe presidential candidates Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (Freedom Party), Giorgi Maisashvili (Party of the Future), and may also have met former MP Guguli Magradze on Saturday, April 25. PolChief met with the three at their request in the Sheraton Hotel following a briefing to the diplomatic corps. When they realized Bakradze was also at the Sheraton, they requested a meeting which Bakradze accepted, according to his chief of staff. The meeting is evidence of the Speaker's willingness to talk -- although it is unlikely that results would emerge from this channel. Irakli Alasania told PolOff that these three opposition leaders were "nuts" and were only begrudgingly allowed to be involved in the protests after much discussion. Bakradze's leak appears to be a tactical move to sow doubt and uncertainty among the non-parliamentary opposition. Other sources have told Post that although the public face was to dismiss the meeting, the news has heightened the already widespread distrust among various non-parliamentary figures.

Counter Accusations of Violence Continue

17. (C) An activist for the Alliance for Georgia was allegedly beaten on Monday night in Kakheti. The activist was assigned to bring protest participants from the region to Qwas assigned to bring protest participants from the region to Tbilisi. Two other protesters were claimed to have been beaten Monday evening about a mile from Parliament. Post has inquired with MOIA about both incidents. A Rustavi 2 journalist and cameraman were allegedly assaulted by three protesters outside of Parliament. TV footage showed the cameraman being punched in the face by a protester and the journalist being shouted at while reporting on the protests. The group opposition youth group Ratom ("Why") got into a brief scuffle with security guards outside the Mayor's office when they were not allowed to spray paint and put signs on the government building. They left without further incident. TEFFT